

Congresswoman Matsui Addresses Broadband Affordability at Digital Inclusion Summit

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Applauds FCC for Recommending Lifeline/Link-up for Broadband as Laid-out in Broadband Affordability Act

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-CA) joined leaders from the Obama Administration, the House of Representatives, and the telecommunications industry today for the "Agenda for America's Digital Inclusion" Summit at the Newseum, presented by Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. As the FCC prepares to deliver the National Broadband Plan to Congress on March 17th, speakers shared their perspective on the opportunities for, barriers to, and possibilities of broadband adoption in America. Rep. Matsui's remarks, as prepared for delivery, are below:

"Thank you to the FCC and the Knight Foundation for hosting this event to discuss the importance of digital inclusion and closing the digital divide in this country. In today's economy, the internet has become a necessity, not a luxury. Americans need affordable and convenient internet access for educational purposes, to apply to college, compare health care options, obtain emergency information and everything in between. And that list will continue to grow as innovation continues.

"Americans also need broadband services to seek job opportunities. In fact, broadband access is key to finding a job in today's economy, as about 75 percent of all U.S. employers now require job-seekers to apply online, leaving those without broadband services at a severe disadvantage. As part of any comprehensive plan to increase broadband access to more Americans, it is critical that we address the affordability barriers that leave millions of Americans on the wrong side of the digital divide.

“A recent survey conducted by the FCC found that 93 million Americans - about one third of the country - are not connected to high-speed internet at home in large part due to the high cost of broadband services. Specifically, the survey found that 36 percent - or 28 million Americans - said that they do not have in-home broadband services because the monthly fee is too expensive and another 10 percent said the broadband installation fee is too high. That is nearly half of all American households who want to subscribe to the internet, but can’t afford the cost.

“I’ve heard from many of my constituents in Sacramento who echo these concerns, including a disabled man who is forced to commute miles to the nearest library just to access the internet.

“The fact is that far too many lower-income families in urban and rural areas are severely disadvantaged in large part by the high cost of broadband services. Millions of American simply can’t afford to pay \$40 to \$60 dollars each month for broadband service when they are struggling just to make ends meet.

“To help close the digital divide in this country, I have introduced the Broadband Affordability Act, which would direct the FCC to create a program for universal broadband adoption similar to the current “Lifeline Assistance” program within the Universal Service Fund. The legislation will ensure that lower-income Americans have access to affordable broadband services. In doing so, households which currently possess broadband service options but have not subscribed because of cost, would no longer be unserved or underserved.

“A lifeline program for broadband will have significant tangible benefits for lower-income households residing in urban areas. It will also greatly benefit consumers in rural areas as more rural telecom providers will build-out to unserved areas knowing that there will be more consumers able to afford their services.

“And as a country we will all benefit by expanding access to broadband. We never know where the next great idea or invention will come from, and the internet offers a world of opportunities for individuals to express themselves and be creative and make sure our country stays competitive in a global marketplace.

“Moving forward, I will continue working with Chairmen Waxman, Boucher, and my colleagues, to ensure that a path to universal broadband adoption becomes a reality this year. I would also like to applaud Chairman Rockefeller and Senator Hutchinson for introducing a similar bi-partisan measure in the Senate.

“It is my understanding that the FCC will include a plan for universal broadband adoption similar to my proposal as a central recommendation to increase broadband adoption rates among lower income households in their upcoming National Broadband Plan recommendations to reform the Universal Service Fund. I applaud the FCC for doing so, using this historic opportunity to help ensure all Americans have access to affordable broadband services, and for taking a major step toward truly closing the digital divide. I look forward to working with my colleagues and with the FCC to make this a reality.”

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